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Environment Secretary Visits Juarez, Mexico to Address Border Issues

(Santa Fe, NM) — New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Secretary Ron Curry joined officials from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Mexican Environmental Protection Agency (PROFEPA), as well as his counterparts from the states of Texas and Chihuahua in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico Thursday to address environmental issues in the border region.

Approximately 200 officials and members of the public attended the meeting at the Centro Cultural Universitario in Juarez. It was held to discuss ways to combat pollution and protect human health and the environment along the border shared by New Mexico, Texas and Chihuahua.

“Along the border, we all have to work to share resources and, when necessary, work together to clean them up,” said Secretary Curry. “The air we breathe in Juarez is the same as that in Anthony and Sunland Park, the environment is not divided by state or national boundaries. By coming together and moving forward bi-nationally, we are making a commitment to protect and restore these resources we all share--our land, air and water.”

Thursday’s meeting was part of the Border 2012 plan, developed as a cooperative agreement by the two countries and their 10 border states to address environmental issues. Part of the Border 2012 framework is the establishment of Regional Workgroups to focus on issues of local importance. This meeting was the first for the Texas-New Mexico-Chihuahua workgroup. Secretary Curry currently serves as co-chair of this group.

“Two of the highest priorities for this administration are rural New Mexico and the border region,” said Secretary Curry. “Since the vast majority of New Mexico’s border is rural, we are going to pay special attention here, finding ways to address these tough environmental issues and improve the quality of life for residents of this area.”

The Border 2012 plan puts a great deal of emphasis on input from individuals and local communities. This “bottom up” approach is designed to best address environmental issues in the border region by utilizing local knowledge, decision-making, priority-setting, and project implementation.

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The plan is designed to identify issues and set specific goals and objectives to address the serious environmental and environmentally related public health challenges in the border region. At this meeting task forces were formed to work towards:

- Reducing water contamination
- Reducing air pollution
- Reducing land contamination.
- Improving environmental health
- Reducing exposure to chemicals as a result of accidental chemical releases and/or acts of terrorism.
- Improving environmental performance through compliance, enforcement, pollution prevention, and promotion of environmental stewardship

In addition to Secretary Curry, the workgroup includes Samuel Coleman of the EPA, Daniel Chacon Anaya of PROFEPA, Robert Cano Hermosillo, Chihuahua's Secretary of Urbanization and Ecology and Ralph Marquez, head of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Its next planning meeting will be held September 10th in Las Cruces.

The 2,000 mile boundary between the U.S. and Mexico, characterized by large deserts, numerous mountain ranges, rivers, wetlands, large estuaries, and shared aquifers, is a center of extraordinary population growth and an environmental concern for both countries. The current population of 11.8 million is predicted to grow to 19.4 million by 2020. Industry has also enjoyed rapid growth in the area since the 1995 NAFTA agreement. Both of these trends are cause for greater environmental vigilance.

With an increase in population and development have come environmental hazards including traffic congestion, increased waste generation, overburdened or unavailable waste treatment and disposal facilities, and more frequent chemical emergencies. Residents of rural areas, such as those along the New Mexico/Chihuahua border, often suffer from exposure to airborne dust, pesticide use and inadequate water supply and waste treatment facilities. Border residents also suffer disproportionately from many environmental health problems including water-borne diseases and respiratory problems.

For more information on the Border 2012 plan see www.epa.gov/usmexicoborder or contact Jon Goldstein, NMED Communications Director at (505) 827-0314.

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